



## FOOD SAFETY RESEARCH: A FOCUS ON

# Listeria monocytogenes

*Listeria monocytogenes* (Lm) is the causative bacteria of listeriosis, a very dangerous and often deadly disease. The CDC reports approximately 2,500 cases a year, 500 of which are fatal. This is more than both *Salmonella* and *Botulism*.

Effectively controlling Lm is challenging and requires intensive management and resources. Although the risk of developing listeriosis is low, the consequences are devastating for both the consumer and the processor.

Due to the ubiquitous nature of the bacteria, it is among the most highly researched foodborne pathogens in the United States, Canada, and many other countries.

In the US, the food industry and government agencies have taken great steps to reduce contamination. The USDA and FDA are establishing performance standards for processing facilities of ready-to-eat (RTE) products. The USDA and FDA monitor plants and food regularly. If a food or plant is contaminated, the agencies intensify inspections and if necessary recall the product.

The CDC's National Center for Infectious Disease works with health departments in outbreak investigations, studying the impact of prevention and education to determine its effects on occurrence.

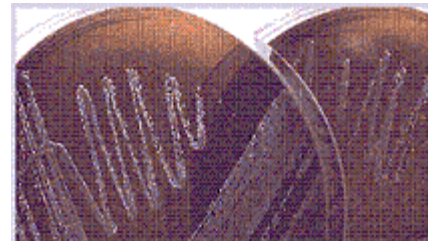
It is the organism's ability to grow and reproduce in a wide variety of conditions that make it

such a dangerous foodborne pathogen. Lm can be isolated from soil and ground water, mammals, raw and pasteurized milk, under-cooked seafood, and RTE meat and poultry products such as hotdogs and lunch meats.

Lm can grow and reproduce at refrigerated temperatures. The infective dose of Lm varies with the strain and susceptibility of the victim, thus the US, Canada, and Europe maintain zero tolerance for Lm.

Listeriosis has been linked to some of the most deadly outbreaks of foodborne illnesses in the US. The disease can affect pregnant women, newborns, and immune compromised adults.

In healthy individuals, the disease can take the form of mild to substantial flu-like symptoms. Lm in pregnant women can lead to stillbirths and miscarriages. Penicillin is effective in the treatment of Listeriosis.



*Standard agar detection method for Lm takes 48h to complete. Rapid methods are being developed and studied.*

## RESEARCH AREAS

Studying the prevalence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in beef processing plants.

Generating a complete genome sequence and plasmids for Lm Scott A strain, serotype 4b.

Determining the effectiveness of irradiation and packaging treatments to control *L. monocytogenes*.

Distinguishing illness causing strains from non-illness causing strains of *L. monocytogenes*.

Evaluating production intervention strategies, education and GMPs.

Evaluating the effectiveness of varying sanitation procedures and products in the controlling of *L.*

Assessing the potential of a biopreservative applied to frankfurter casings for control of Lm.

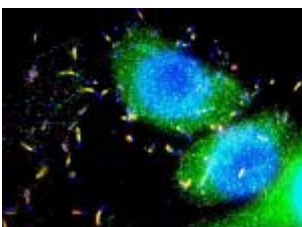
Evaluating the dose-response of infection following an intragastric inoculation of Lm.

Studying post-cooking intervention to eliminate *L. monocytogenes* from packaged and refrigerated RTE

Evaluating the appropriateness of an absolute zero tolerance for *Listeria* levels.

Evaluating more sensitive detection methods for low level healthy or injured cell detection of *L.*

Developing better agars and quicker rapid detection methods.



*L. monocytogenes.*  
 Image courtesy of David Drubin, University of California

## FSRIO DATABASE PROJECTS

Projects in the FSRI database related to this topic are listed below. Visit FSRI online to access the projects.

Assessment of the Public Health Impact of Foodborne *Listeria monocytogenes*

*Food and Drug Administration - Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition*

Control Strategies for *Listeria monocytogenes* in Food Processing Environments

*USDA - Cooperative State Research Education and Extension*

Genome Sequence for *Listeria Monocytogenes*  
*USDA*

Identification of *Listeria monocytogenes* Genetic Clusters Having Increased Pathogenic Potential (2001-02998)

*USDA - National Research Initiative*

Inhibition of *L. monocytogenes* Biofilms by Plasma-Deposited Antibacterial Layers

*USDA - Cooperative State Research Education and Extension*

Modeling the Antimicrobial Effect of Lactate on the Growth and survival of *Listeria Monocytogenes* on Ready To Eat Seafood

*Joint Institute of Food Safety and Applied Nutrition*

Post-process Pasteurization of Packaged, Ready-to-eat Meat Products for Control of *Listeria monocytogenes*

*USDA - Cooperative State Research Education and Extension*

Transfer Coefficients for *Listeria* Cross-Contamination  
*Food and Drug Administration - Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition*

## RESOURCES

This factsheet was produced using the resources listed below. Visit FSRI online to access these links.

### Listeriosis

*CDC/National Center for Infectious Diseases, Division of Mycotic Diseases*

### *Listeria monocytogenes*

*USDA/FSIS*

### *Listeria monocytogenes* - Bad Bug Book

*FDA/CFSAN*

### How to Safely Handle Refrigerated RTE Foods and Avoid Listeriosis

*FDA/CFSAN*



This fact sheet is one of several information products developed by the Food Safety Research Information Office (FSRIO) at the USDA's National Agricultural Library (NAL). Fact sheets on specific food safety research topics are available on the FSRI web site at:

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio/research/fsheets.htm>

FSRIO is a unique resource for the food safety research community. The program features a web site that serves as a gateway to research information and includes a database of federally-funded research projects. The database is available for researchers, policymakers, consumers and others to learn about research initiatives, and assist the government in assessing food safety research needs and priorities, thereby minimizing duplication of effort. FSRI also provides a reference service at no charge.

Created by: Kristina Brandriff, Information Specialist

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**Food Safety Research Information Office**  
10301 Baltimore Ave, Room 304, Beltsville, MD 20705-2351  
Phone: 301-504-7374 Fax: 301-504-7680  
Email: [fsrio@nal.usda.gov](mailto:fsrio@nal.usda.gov)